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‘When an old cricketer leaves the crease’: Bittersweet reflections on examination awards in physical education

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Abstract

The paper reflects on the development of examination awards in physical education from a predominantly autobiographical research perspective. The paper draws on experiences and reflections from *inside* examinations as a teacher, part of the policy and implementation process and document author and *outside* examinations as a researcher of the aspirations of awards and policy enactment in schools in Scotland. This combined perspective proceeds via a largely chronological appraisal of school and national policy developments allied to analysis from a wider academic review of progress. Despite early enthusiasm by students and many teachers the review highlights the problems of announcing policy rather than engaging with the ongoing detail of policy problems. This approach has led to variable progress and a lack of boldness in making learning suitably personalized with closer connections between practice and theory informing teaching and assessment. Furthermore, through the adoption of rote learning and assessment procedures, teachers have become complicit in affirming that while greater educational goals are achievable their particular practices are unlikely to realize these goals. In order to avoid further regression it is argued that examination awards need to unlock practice problems through engaging with research evidence which assists in understanding better the complex components of authentic practice, practice and theory integration and how increased use of digital technologies can personalize learning and enliven teaching and assessment. Without this occurring, examinations in Scottish physical education represent something akin to a pyrrhic victory, where expanding policy provision has left behind rather underwhelming learning gains and where teachers’ sense of agency is curtailed by a messy combination of difficult to rectify professional concerns.

Key words: physical education, biographical research, examination awards, critical reflection, policy enactment, curriculum design, learning, assessment, pedagogical practices, Scotland

Introduction

In the year I began physical education teacher training in 1975, the record '*When an old cricketer leaves the crease*' by Roy Harper was first released. The record evokes the atmosphere of a village cricket match and is a lament to the way the game was played during Harper's youth. Aided by mellow acoustic guitar and the Grimethorpe colliery band on brass, the song has a nostalgic sense for times passed. While never a hit record, it is often fondly remembered and every now and then played at funerals. Over four decades on, the themes in the record remain a prompt for recalling times past, and in my own professional context of reviving memories of examination awards in physical education; a development which effectively bookend my career. Thus, in the spirit of '*When an old cricketer leaves the crease*', the purpose of the paper is to reflect on the scope of examination award ambitions, their potential for thriving within policy arrangements, and the extent to which various awards have made the most of the curriculum opportunities available. In carrying out this intention, I write from beside the boundary rope; uninvolved now in the policy process and semi-detached from researching the detail of the design and implementation of different awards, but watching on nevertheless for signs of something more encouraging and certain than '*a fleeting glimpse of a twelfth man at silly Mid-on.*'

The method taken forward is largely autobiographical and based on a fundamental immersion with a range of issues (Tedder, 2012) e.g., from the conceptual through to the practical details of curriculum design, pedagogical practices and the quality of students learning and assessment experiences. The ebb and flow of this predominantly chronological approach is further nuanced by having been both *inside* and *outside* the development of examination awards in Scotland over

the last forty years. Thus, the autobiographical turn is evident in reflections which are drawn from *inside* engagement as a teacher of examination awards, an examiner of awards, contributor to the policy construction process, local authority and national development officer and textbook author on learning and assessment, as well as being on the *outside* as a researcher of policy aspirations and policy implementation and enactment e.g., Thorburn and Collins (2003); Thorburn (2007). This approach is similar to the autoethnography approach Casey and Fletcher (2012) adopted when reviewing their personal transitions from teachers to teacher educators. The appeal of these relatively new approaches to educational enquiry is that they enable a broad range of first-hand insights to be included when trying to understand local contexts and events relative to more general trends. The downside is that they can be anecdotal, biased and overly reliant on description. To help counteract the latter the intention is to draw upon documentary research methods in the form of policy arrangements and meeting notes as a source of primary evidence (McCulloch, 2012) as well as reviewing some of the relevant research articles which exist. Thus, the approach aims to avoid undue nostalgia and melancholy and focus instead on comprehending better what happened in examination awards and what can help bring to the attention of the physical education community nowadays the priorities which merit research and analysis. The context for reflection and review is predominantly a Scottish one as Scotland was at the forefront of attempts to try and introduce imaginative experiential-led awards within a high stakes examination setting. By focusing on one relatively small country the intention is that this strategy can tease out some of the complexities of how key events unfolded and form connections with examination physical education concerns across the Anglophone world. In taking this remit forward, space is necessarily limited for a wider analysis of policy problems and their solutions relative to educational theorizing on policy enactment. Penney (2017) has made

progress on this matter and makes reference to examination physical education in Western Australia in so doing. Therefore, the expectation is that there is scope for interested readers to map the points raised in this paper onto a wider review of policy enactment and educational theorizing.

New curriculum and pedagogical opportunities: examination awards in the 1980s

From the *inside* the years before examination awards were largely marked by concerns over the educational contribution of physical education under a predominantly academic conception of education, where curriculum experiences were often impacted upon by modest facilities, limited time and inflexible timetable arrangements. However impressive in retrospect these programmes might appear it is difficult not to recall signs of Kirk's (2010) critique i.e., that an over-reliance on shallow and dislocated introductory-level teaching approaches did little to nurture students' growth. Thus, before examinations began it was difficult to argue for greater curriculum prominence on the basis that physical education was *more* important than a vast array of other subjects. The time was right therefore for physical education to consider its examination position, or else acknowledge as Reid (1997, p. 6) phrased it, the subjects 'incurably marginal status.' After four years teaching I was (in 1983) promoted to a Head of Department (HoD) role in a high achieving academically focused comprehensive school in the North-East of Scotland. The aforementioned facilities, time and timetable challenges were experienced - and more. At my first annual prize giving the rather conservative minded Head Teacher believed it would be a good idea to invite HoD's onto the stage in what he considered to be reverse order of subject priority. You might anticipate who was expected to be first out of the traps. I mention this vignette not for sympathy (or even laughs) but to make the vital point that for many teachers in

similar positions examinations awards were *once* the future of physical education. Other leading priorities, such as engaging teachers in working more closely across school and community boundaries were therefore largely put on hold until the start of the twenty-first century (Thorburn & Gray, 2010).

As Brewer and Sharp (1999, p. 542) note, the first examination award in the mid-1980s, a two-year Standard Grade Physical Education (SGPE) course for students in the middle years of secondary school education (14-16 years old), became ‘a defining moment for the way Physical Education teachers perceived their professional role in the life of the school’. Each school devised their own course based on a mix of activities, learning experiences and attainment outcomes which satisfied national arrangements. The policy guidance was relatively detailed in defining content knowledge but less elaborate in outlining how the planned integration between Performance and Knowledge and Understanding and Evaluating might take place in practical experiential learning environments. This approach challenged teachers as the expectation within the comprehensive schooling structure which predominates in Scotland is one which requires essentially *all* teachers to be capable of teaching centrally developed awards. The awards quickly became popular with just over a quarter of students choosing SGPE with all this entailed for increasing staffing and the curriculum prominence of physical education (Thorburn, 2010). The awards were quite innovative as well; the assessment of Knowledge and Understanding and Evaluating (which had an equal assessment weighting with Performance) was completed through student responses to video prompts. From a personal perspective there was a relishing of the enhanced curriculum prominence of physical education and the chance to take forward rich learning experiences, which helped students learn about varied activities and their own ability

and understanding of them. Learning involved greater progression and there was a sense of making a more significant educational contribution than previously. There was pedagogical risk as well; students did not enjoy occasional classroom based sessions where their engagement was invariably poorer than it was for practical sessions in Games Halls and the like. Overall, SGPE was quite successful in its effort to locate physical education within a largely academic conception of education, while emphasizing in plural terms the benefits of being physically educated. The idea of offering choice at school level based on selecting certain categories of activities was widely praised with the rationale revealing a latent demand for examination courses (Thomson, 1993). The SGPE design frame remained unaltered in terms of its basic structure for the next thirty years (1984-2014).

During the development of SGPE, Thomson (1993) noted that lecturers in teacher education were increasingly marginalized as the balance of power for the development of policy and practice shifted to central government departments and the Inspectorate. In this context, selected teachers became pivotal to contributing to policy groups, presenting professional development sessions, writing curriculum support materials and taking on a more direct responsibility for examining awards at local (unitary) authority and national level. The strengths and limitations of this approach are discussed later save for mentioning at this point that professional learning support for teachers was relative high, especially in terms of receiving fleshed-out course exemplars and the number of development workshops provided at school and local authority level. Furthermore, by becoming an assessor for some or all course components teachers could become informed about national standards in ways which benefitted their own in-school learning, teaching and assessment. Despite the promise of SGPE some of the issues which were

to beset examinations awards in future years quickly became apparent. SGPE was much more popular with male than female students (on a roughly 70/30 basis) with the gendered nature of content knowledge further exacerbating concerns (Kirk, 2002). In brief, the skill and fitness bias within the content knowledge specified came at the expense of a greater cognitive/aesthetic perspective on experience. These concerns were largely unaddressed and are indicative of a policy context where policy was announced rather than evaluated with problems addressed on an ongoing basis following initial implementation (Thorburn & Horrell, 2011). This is despite fears being raised by the Inspectorate about the nature of learning e.g., ‘Too many teachers resort to the classroom, a ‘talk and chalk’ approach ... in contrast to the spirit of the Standard Grade Arrangements Document and the emphasis on a practical-experiential approach to the development of knowledge and understanding’ (SOED/HMIE, 1995, 5.29). There was also evidence of a skewed assessment profile with most students achieving far more marks for performance than for knowledge and understanding and evaluating.

Vision, degrees of coherence and full implementation: examination awards in the 1990s

The widespread expansion of examination awards in the Anglophone world occurred during the 1990s (Green, 2008). In Queensland, Australia the integrated thinking of learning ‘in’, ‘through’ and ‘about’ movement (Arnold, 1979) was adopted as the theoretical touchstone for their first senior school examination award. At the time, Peter Arnold was a Scottish-based educator who worked at the Dunfermline College of Physical Education (DCPE) in Edinburgh. The influence of Arnold’s dimensions of movement work became widespread across Australia and informed successive state and territory-based examination developments. Brown (2013) has extolled the capacity of Arnold’s (1979) theorizing to inform a progressive version of integrated learning in a

high stakes examination context. And, while Stolz and Thorburn (2017) are more skeptical about the quality and coherence of Arnold's (1979) work, the key point is that nearly four decades on there remains an academic need for more detailed investigations of the links between theory and practice in examination physical education. Moreover, policy attempts in Scotland to think through integration-related theory and practice issues failed to make the most of the considerable expertise available. For in addition to Peter Arnold, two other notable philosophers of physical education, Andrew Reid and David Carr were working at DCPE (later Moray House School of Education); a remarkable occurrence given the smallness of Scotland and its single centre provision for physical education teacher education at the time.

During the 1990s I became heavily involved in the policy implementation process. This included being seconded for two years (1990-1992) to support curriculum developments in schools at a local authority level, a national examiner for the new senior school Higher level (HGPE) award from 1994 to 1996 and Principal Examiner from 1996 to 1999, and a member of the national policy making (Higher Still) group from 1994 to 1999. It also involved two further periods of secondment for a total of 18 months as a National Development Officer and curriculum support writer. However, it was only when joining University education in 1999 that I became aware of Reid and Carr discussing in conceptual terms the knowledge and practice claims of physical education in curriculum and assessment terms (Reid 1996a, 1996b; Carr, 1997). Quite simply, Reid's questioning of the adequacy of the rationale advanced for new higher awards, largely on the basis of its acquiescence with conventional dualist mind/body philosophical thinking, as evidenced by the confusion of how to understand practical learning gains by means of extended written answers, were never aired during the increasingly managed policy process (Thorburn

2010). Missing out on the expertise of Reid and Carr mattered as the policy working groups during the 1990s were (as well as reviewing rationale matters) teasing out the content knowledge and assessment arrangements which could accompany a practical experiential rationale for a Higher-level award capable of contributing to students entry qualifications for Higher Education. These types of course planning concerns continue to this day. For example, Brown and Penney (2017) found when reviewing the pedagogical extent to which teachers of senior secondary physical education in Victoria, Australia were engaging with Arnold's (1979) dimensions of movement, that greater engagement between curriculum authorities, professional learning associations and teacher educational institutions was required in order to achieve more lucid progress.

One further aspect of the limited connections between school and Higher education was that it mattered which teachers were invited to drive the policy implementation process forward. For as Humes (1999) notes, teachers in seconded positions needed to satisfy two divergent audiences, policy stakeholders at national level and practicing teachers at a local level. Thus, while there were doubtless aspects of privilege, patronage and fortune in being invited onto policy groups there was also a rather inexact expectation that invited teachers possessed knowledge and experiences which would benefit policy implementation. These attributes were necessary, for in similar ways to SGPE, there was unease in some quarters that the narrowness of focus on performance improvement via skill learning, fitness training and tactical perspectives compromised the contribution of a more personalized perspective on learning. This led policy makers to emphasize the centrality of an area of analysis called performance appreciation as a general perspective all students should engage with through concepts such as the nature of

performance and personal performance qualities. Despite this policy steer performance appreciation was seldom chosen by teachers as a contributor to courses with assessment answers remaining few in number and poor in quality (Thorburn 2010). This is an unsurprising finding as MacPhail's (2004, 2007) research examining the introduction of the HGPE award in the mid-1990s indicates that most teachers wished greater prescription and less by way of new extended freedoms when planning the introduction of awards. In this regard, Brewer (2003) has concerns about whether the model of policy development being taken forward offered teachers a suitably congenial support service which can help bolster teachers confidence to enact a practical experiential learning rationale. Furthermore, MacPhail's (2004, 2007) research highlighted that the policy mismatch between national stakeholders and school-level planning resulted in variable uptake, with the enthused early adopters (i.e., schools where there was interested students, reasonable facilities and keen teachers) introducing awards sooner than schools where there was a more reluctant engagement with curriculum planning and development.

As well as fears about the gradual introduction of courses there was also unease over the quality of students learning experiences as a consequence of teachers' breadth of engagement with the pedagogical opportunities available. Allied to these concerns was a continuing apprehension about the international sameness of the knowledge base supporting examination awards. Recently, Whittle, Benson and Telford (2017) completed a document review of 15 senior secondary physical education courses with analysis revealing similarities in content knowledge with content firmly based on the biophysical and sociocultural fields of study. The authors also highlight that by expressing content knowledge in prescribed stand-alone units the relationship between knowledge and course rationales requires investigation in terms of how teachers

interpret curriculum guidance. The early evidence from the Scottish context was that the higher-level focus on the student as performer/reviewer of their own experiences added to the challenges of gaining knowledge from experience irrespective of whichever area of content knowledge was being used for analytical purposes. Thus, teachers remit was a demanding one as it required teachers to recall and ask considered questions which met the requirements of individual students and at other times the needs of the whole group. How the detail of this teaching context was taken forward mattered, for as McNamee and Bailey (2010) discuss, many in education believe that physical education is much more a field of study than a form of knowledge. The implication in educational status terms is that key to being a meaningful field of study is ensuring that practical experiences contain some form of substantial initiation and human significance which additionally benefits from being supported by knowledge from wherever it is drawn e.g., from the human sciences (psychology, sociology) and/or from the physical sciences (anatomy, biomechanics, skill acquisition). This position supports calls for a broad range of knowledges being available to support student learning rather than the narrow range that might be happening in practice (Whittle, Benson & Telford, 2017). To follow the contrary view i.e., that examinations in physical education represents a distinct form of knowledge would be to pursue a dualist line of thinking which believes that in curriculum terms there is a body of information which requires to be studied in it-self and in ways which are not necessarily connected with practical experiences. From my teaching and research experiences this is flawed thinking (Thorburn, 2007).

Credibility, variability and simplification: examination awards in the 2000s

During the late 1990s evidence of the benefits of new higher level awards (e.g., enthusiasm by students for awards, innovative features surrounding experiential approaches to learning and of physical examination becoming a central part of the examined curriculum in nearly all secondary schools in Scotland) needed to be considered alongside Principal Examiner reporting which showed occasional examples of high quality work, frequent evidence of the standard assessment profile (i.e., very high performance marks and modest analytical marks) and frequent rote learning and assessment procedures. The latter evidence was of considerable discomfort to claims about the academic credibility of examinations awards and highlighted the difficulties many teachers were having in enacting a practical experiential rationale in the authentic manner anticipated. There also remained ongoing unease over the low representation of female students and associated concerns about the breath of engagement many students were having with various perspectives on experience. The policy response during two sets of curriculum reviews (Scottish Qualifications, 1999, 2004) was to simplify learning and assessment procedures through reducing the width of content knowledge and lowering assessment demands e.g., a two and half hour examination was replaced with a simpler one and half hour examination which carried the same assessment weighting. This simplification took precedence over elaborating how practical experiential learning can provide students with opportunities to develop critical and imaginative practice and gain an improved understanding of performance and the ways it can be developed. It also took precedence over detailing how practical workshops as a method of learning could cope with the heightened integration loading required for courses at higher level.

As the years passed improvements in the profile of assessment failed to occur. In order to avoid the rising tide of polarized theory and practice concerns (Brewer, 2003) the bolder policy option

of integrating the course units together so that there was full integration of learning, teaching and assessment (as could have been achieved by insisting that students achieve the same standard in their performance *and* analysis work) was never taken. This was resisted on the basis that separate units of assessment ensured students whose main attributes were for performance (relative to analysis) could achieve partial (unit) success if not an overall course award. In practice, this strategy had very little benefit for students and/or the academic credibility of awards. Furthermore, many teachers became caught between the pressures of taking forward policy encouragement to be active agents in the change process while seeking out support that would help raise the achievement levels of their students during a time when comparisons of teacher effectiveness were becoming outcome driven. As Lennon (2003, p. 422) notes, Scottish schools were operating ‘in a mixed message universe’ where one of the great paradoxes of education was for teachers to reconcile national-level encouragement for more pedagogical risk-taking at the same time as needing to respond to national-level target setting imperatives, the evidence from which was often used to compare schools.

This rather parlous context was compounded by the lack of educational theory informing the design of physical education awards. For example, with regard to integrated learning and teaching, Placek (1996, pp. 292-293) noted that:

...almost no research has been done on this type of curriculum. We are left to ask, therefore, the most fundamental questions about integration. First, can students learn conceptual material in PE?... Can concepts be taught without detriment to the development of psychomotor skills?... Will students use the conceptual material later in life?... What is the best way to teach concepts in different settings?... Given the recent

emphasis on conceptual skills by textbook authors and curriculum developers, questions such as these need answers.

These sentences informed the design of my doctoral studies which through three stages of data collection completed a longitudinal research programme into the effectiveness of integrated teaching, learning and assessment, from both teachers and students perspectives, using the higher level examination award as the context for research (Thorburn, 2010). Evidence from the first phase identified commonalities between certain ‘types’ of schools. ‘Trying’ schools were characterized by following the policy rationale but with modest assessment success. In these schools, teachers were rather overtaken by the multiple challenges of embracing constructive teaching methodologies, covering the width and depth of course content and making effective decisions about how to complete assessment procedures. Next were ‘rote schools where teachers had decided that the extent of their assessment concerns merited the development of prescriptive answers that could be rote-learned by students. Teachers recognized the conflict which existed between their views of teaching relative to their assessment approaches. Lastly, there were high achieving ‘successful’ schools where teaching was characterized by a high level of expertise for performance-led teaching environments, where the students were highly motivated and engaged with tasks. Students in these schools completed the assessment answers in the divergent open manner expected (Thorburn & Collins, 2003). Next, more detailed data about the quality of students’ learning and assessment experiences relative to schools previously described as either ‘trying’, ‘rote’ or ‘successful’ was reviewed. Thorburn & Collins (2006a) found that there was no compelling evidence that teachers’ pedagogical practices could lead to high levels of authentic attainment on a yearly basis with even ‘successful’ teachers having difficulty in sustaining progress. In explaining the comparatively poor examination achievements of students,

many teachers considered that it was the bluntness of written assessment instruments which placed students at a disadvantage. Consequently, the third research phase compared oral and written assessment instruments. This did not confirm the expected higher levels of attainment anticipated by many teachers. However, it did provide encouraging evidence that completing oral assessments can be valuable for both teachers and students in receiving feedback about levels of content knowledge understanding (Thorburn & Collins, 2006b). Collectively, these findings highlighted the need for further research to analyse the conceptual challenges of integrating learning, teaching and assessment as policy encouragement for empowering teachers to exercise creativity in determining how best to meet the needs of students was rarely translating into inspirational practice.

Regression, fidelity and uncertain futures: examination awards in the 2010s

The National Qualification (NQ) replacements for SGPE and Higher level awards introduced as part of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) from 2014 onwards did not notably address the integration issues discussed or ongoing concerns about gender representation, the nature of content knowledge and unitization of awards. As such, the introduction of NQ awards raises questions about regression and fidelity. For example, awards at levels 4 & 5 (the equivalent of Standard Grade General and Credit levels) contain fewer practical activities and therefore a possible narrowing of learning relative to the pluralism of SGPE. At Higher level, awards now have a 60% weighting for performance and moreover the single activity required for assessment purposes can be chosen (wherever possible) by the students. This arrangement perhaps overly fulfils the requirement for personalization and choice, which along with challenge and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, coherence and relevance are the defining curriculum

principles of CfE (Scottish Government, 2008). As well as regression concerns about teachers becoming more of a facilitator/assessor than an imaginative educator, the new higher award raises further questions about what students, Higher Education institutions and potential employers are gaining from the degree of academic credit afforded to performance. For even, Arnold (1979) who tried at length to articulate the learning connections between meaning and movement, came to acknowledge that language in some form is required when measuring learning gains. However, rather than conceptualising in greater detail how closer integration between performance and factors influencing performance might be possible, higher units can now be taught separately on a free standing basis. Furthermore, in line with the stand-alone problems highlighted by Whittle, Benson and Telford (2017), in order to connect factors influencing performance to the overall CfE curriculum emphasis on physical, social, emotional and mental wellbeing, definitions of content knowledge were separated out into knowledge silos for explanatory purposes. A concern with such confused thinking and loss of fidelity towards achieving high quality practical experiential learning gains is that it is self-inflicted rather than as a consequence of policy emerging from a highly politicized process. Penney and Evans (1999) highlight that between 1988 and 1997 plans to introduce physical education as part of the first ever national curriculum in England and Wales were considerably affected by central government influences on how education should be managed and defined. Penney (2017) also recounts similar findings from her experiences in Western Australia where changes in State government led to a re-direction of reforms and to the progressive intent of new senior physical education courses being lost. These types of concerns however rarely apply in Scotland as wider policy influences such as economic liberalism have not noticeably impacted on physical education arrangements thus far. For example, during the late 1990s policy discussions at Higher

level on whether performance should move to a 50% weighting from the original 40% first used in the early 1990s took place without academic status and credibility concerns being raised by policy stakeholders. What has changed however as Thorburn and Horrell (2011) note, is that joining the policy process has become largely shaped by volunteerism rather than the patronage and privilege of times past. Whether volunteerism is an adequate point of entry for supporting the implementation of national policies is open to doubt as what appears clear three decades after examinations began is that teachers still seek more detailed curriculum guidance. In investigating the impact of high stakes examinations on teachers capacity to act as agents of change in Scotland, Simmons and MacLean (2016) note that while teachers found the flexible nature of the new policy positive in principle, they remained concerned about the lack of explicit documentation, the vagueness of exemplars and the limited definition of assessment criteria. Biesta, Priestley & Robinson (2017) value the form of research Simmons and MacLean (2016) completed as they consider that teachers talk about education is an important resource in achieving agency, independence from policy and everyday discourses about education. That said Biesta et al., (2017) also found that teachers' vocabularies were often limited and similar and this hindered opportunities for critical evaluation and alternative courses of action to be considered.

The various dilemmas posed by the contrast between policy expectations and variable everyday practices in schools raises questions about the profile and priority afforded to examination awards in future years. In terms of making matters more certain in the short term and in order to avoid a stifling sameness (as evident by a focus on objective-laden data collection and reporting, a narrowing of content knowledge accessed and fewer opportunities for students to provide rich and personalized narrative-led accounts of their movement experiences) more insightful policy

arrangements and inspirational exemplars of learning, teaching and assessment practice are necessary. If these exemplars can help teachers critically evaluate their courses it may lead to greater signs of authentic improvements in students' quality of learning. This can help in overcoming the concern Whittle et al. (2017) raises of students' lack of content knowledge in high-stakes examinations in Victoria, Australia limiting teachers' capacity to experiment with practical experiences in ways which coherently support students' assessment answers. Small qualitative improvements such as these may reduce the extent to which teachers fixate on assessment procedures and outcomes with the backwash effect produced stifling pedagogical experimentation and narrowing the scope of students' learning opportunities.

In the longer term however something more profound is needed in order for the future of examination awards to be more secure – as evident, for example, by students taking on a much more constructive responsibility for their learning and on teachers becoming much more confident in their pedagogical practices and less dependent of the provision of support materials and professional guidance. In this light, it seems something of an own goal that so few academics are currently interested in examinations in physical education as a detailed context for their research. From my collective experiences, pivotal to progress is ensuring that research evidence informs policy and practice in three priority areas - course design, course practice and course assessment. Firstly, in considering the integration of learning, teaching and assessment, course design arrangements would benefit from engaging with authors such as Stolz (2014) and Standal (2016) who have used phenomenology as a theoretical approach for forging relationships between embodied actions, practices of movement and individual student needs. In addition, Standal and Aggerholm (2016) have reviewed the usefulness of how Dewey's emphasis on thought and actions

can help merge engagement in activity with problem solving enquiry. This research highlights that open-ended experiences are strengthened when students possess initiative and are curious to reconstruct their experiences in order to grow further. As experiences proliferate, students' thoughts and feelings can reveal independent thoughts, a sense of experimentation, critical enquiry and observational insight. Applying this level of theory in examination award contexts could invigorate discussions on practical knowledge and skill acquisition and of how practical workshops might plausibly work as the fulcrum for learning and teaching.

Secondly, amidst general concerns over the loss of fidelity on how some course practices are enacted it needs to be recognized that there are likely to be inspirational examples of learning, teaching and assessment in examination awards. Macmillan (2017) found through a detailed qualitative research study of high ability teachers in physical education that while direct teaching was evident there were also instances of teacher-guided practice, learner-led practice, teacher-learner negotiated practice, and learner-initiated practice. This degree of variation is at odds with many strands of physical education research and calls for researchers to identify and track practitioners who have broad teaching repertoires, who use novel in-the-moment practices and who can thrive on minimal policy guidance. Insights gleaned on this basis could increase collective understandings of the multiple influences which inform levels of experiential learning in schools. These findings could then be considered alongside studies such as Whittle, Telford and Benson's (2015) analysis of student perceptions of the teacher-related factors which influence academic performance and with aforementioned evidence from conceptual research on the challenges of integrating theory and practice.

Lastly, unlocking digital technologies could enliven learning and teaching and remove some of the draining evidence of staid assessment arrangements where recalling past practical experiences is difficult for a whole host of contextual reasons. The foresight of SGPE having once introduced a video-based national examination now seems a distant memory relative to the deadening tedium of requiring students to produce extended written answers in examination halls. Casey, Goodyear and Armour (2017) have edited contributions from over 60 academics on digital technologies and learning in physical education and within the detail of these contributions resides the possible trigger for more specific research investigations on how student learning can be optimized. This is highly likely to orbit around how data can be quickly captured and accurately analysed followed by consideration of how digital technologies can pep up assessment procedures through the range of presenting opportunities they afford students. Many of these types of ideas were scoped out in Scotland in the mid-1990s. However, the stumbling block was the rather laissez-faire policy approach adopted combined with a tentativeness by teachers in exploring fully the potential of open-ended guidelines, especially in relation to taking on more responsibility for school-based assessment. Twenty years on the quality of research evidence on investigative, student driven, practically led forms of enquiry need to trump these concerns. Unless this occurs, the extent to which higher order thinking skills can be cultivated through experiential learning approaches which recognize the fidelity of the body in education remains open to doubt.

Conclusion

‘When the moment comes and the gathering stands and the clock turns back to reflect

On the years of grace as those footsteps trace for the last time out of the act

*Well this way of life's recollection, the hallowed strip in the haze
The fabled men and the noonday sun are much more than just yarns of their days'*
(Harper, 1976)

Through adopting a largely autobiographical perspective this paper has engaged with a range of conceptual and practice issues associated with the design and practice of physical education examination awards in Scotland. The predominantly chronological review has highlighted a number of contextual concerns arising from rather naïve policy approaches which tend towards announcing policy rather than engaging with the ongoing detail of highlighting policy problems and designing viable policy solutions. This approach has led to variable progress and a general lack of boldness in making learning suitably personalized with all the gains this could bring for highlighting how integration between practice and theory could thrive in high-stakes examination award contexts. Moreover, through widespread engagement with rote learning and assessment procedures teachers have become complicit in affirming that while loftier educational goals are achievable their particular practices are unlikely to realize these goals. Quite why so many teachers have got themselves into this predicament at a time when the policy emphasis is on empowering teachers is deeply perplexing, especially as there has been so little open complaint from teachers. Following Casey and O'Donovan (2013), some teachers may have inadvertently overestimated the demands of examination awards and unnecessarily dismissed the pedagogical approaches which have worked so well for them in practical physical education lessons elsewhere in the curriculum. In order to avoid further regression, examination awards need to strategically identify the practice problems which require unlocking and then engage with research evidence which can assist with understanding better, for example, the closer

integration of practice and theory, the ingredients of high quality authentic practice and of how digital technologies can help personalize learning and enliven teaching and assessment. While some may consider my views rather maudlin my bittersweet opinion is that without this occurring examinations in Scottish physical education will represent little more than a pyrrhic victory with expanded policy provision leaving a legacy of rather underwhelming learning gains and where teachers' sense of agency is curtailed by a messy mix of difficult to rectify professional concerns.

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